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ABSTRACT

This study (part of a larger study of 104 boys and girls) examined the moral and cognitive development of 37 female elementary school students in an independent college preparatory day school in the midwestern United States. Six students (two each in kindergarten, grade 2, and grade 4) were interviewed for the study, which found that the girls in the study were practicing communal sense by taking their impressions and responses from the adults, friends, and institutions in which they participated, and constructing a schema for themselves based on their knowledge of mental and cultural relativism. The study found that girls as young as kindergarten age were already experiencing training for "nice." While boys were praised for their knowledge and giving the right answer, girls were praised for obedience and compliance. It also found that the girls were learning the "proper" role for their sex, based on teacher and parental expectations and actions demonstrating behavior described as "learned helplessness." Girls learned the values of "nice" which existed in the upper middle class community of the family, and saw these values translated into a school setting chosen for them by their parents. It is noted that the families of the girls represented in this study do not reflect the demographics of the majority of families in the United States. They do, however, represent the majority of the 37 girls who participated in the study. (Contains 35 references.) (MDM)

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ED 385 380

Who Waits for the White Knight?: Training in Nice

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A child is more than the construct of childhood and child as icon or sign, but rather is an evolving self who often uncritically assimilates designators from her/his world. The child carries these signs through time, and in time, creates a personal culture from meaning made and taken from the world that is given to her/him.

Our work began with an examination of moral and cognitive development of children (67 boys, K-4, and 37 girls K-5) who were students in two independent college preparatory schools (Tillman & McDonald, 1992), and found that the actual decisions of the children were bound by the physical contexts in which they occured (Tillman & McDonald, 1994). The children tried to organize their experiences and elicit how a person "like me" (Bakhtin, 1986) was supposed to act in order to replicate positive experiences and/or avoid negative experiences. We have discussed the interactive worlds of parents, friends, and the school as they exist in the lives of the children (Tillman et al, 1992; Tillman & McDonald, 1994a, 1994b). Each of these worlds is carefully given to a child and represents a process of enculturation into the larger society in which the child lives. There are times when these worlds can be inconsistent. However, we believe that when a convergence of the overlapping cultures represented by home (family), school (teachers), and friendships occurs and is consistent, the child experiences complete congruence in meaning that is free from any contraditions or dissonance. It is through this process that the children in this study learned not only how their world functioned and who was important in it, but also the essentials of personal identity, from concepts of gender to what is valued in their community.

Girls as young as Kindergarten were already experiencing training for "nice". The girls revealed both examined and unexamined strategies they had assimilated in what was described by Vico as the "technique of reading [his] sources between the lines, attending not only to what the author intended to say but also to his 'involuntary revelations'...about the culture and society...(Burke, 1985). We believe that it is in this way that the young girls in this study are learning to negotiate and attain the status of "nice girl".

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Discussion of the Literature Review :

This literature discussion began with a focus on the studies of children's moral development and cognitive development (Piaget, 1932, 1965; Kohlberg, 1969, 1984; Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Erikson, 1950, 1986) as well as the nature of choices and actual decisons made by children and adults. We felt a strong need to trace the information on developmental theory in order to understand how the investigation of moral action and decision-making evolved and the methods psychological theories of development had defined growth in terms of separation, individuation and autonomy (Freud, 1905; Piaget, 1932,1965; Erikson, 1950, 1968). Development was characterized as unidemensional and universal. The self as separate from others was central to these theories and these theoretical premises influenced theorists who focused on moral development (Piaget, 1932,1965; Kohlberg, 1969,1984; Gilligan, 1982; Gibbs, 1977).

Children's construction of self mirrors values communicated from their society and includes concepts of gender. Children are expected to acquire those attributes defined as masculine or feminine by their culture and in turn, these serve as basic organizing principles, i.e., skills, self-concepts, and personality attributes. This process of translation is known as sex-typing, or gendering and refers to the extent to which one conforms to prescribed male and female gender roles (Golombok & Fivush,1994). Gender stereotyping refers to a set of beliefs as to what it means to be male or female and includes information about physical appearance, attitudes and interests, psychological traits, social relations, and occupations (Ashmore, DelBoca, & Wahlers,1986; Deaux & Lewis,1984; Huston, 1985, 1983). These dimensions are interrelated, so that the knowing of one's gender implies knowing that the person will have certain physical characteristics and psychological traits and will engage in particular kinds of activities (Deaux & Lewis,1983).

Theories of gender differences emerge from those of development and represent views that are biological, psychoanalytic, social learning, and cognitive in origin. Biologically based explanations of gender differences stress reproductive organs and functions, hormones, and brain structure to advance their main point that there is something qualitatively different about the way the two sexes are physically and biologically constituted, and that these differences account for gender differences in the division of labor by sex, and differences of status and power (Nielsen,1990). Freud's

psychoanalytic theory of personality and gender development posits that females are sexually and morally inferior to males (Freud,1931); however, there is no emperical evidence to suggest that boys and girls progress through the psychosexual stages outlined by his theory (Golumbok & Fivush,1994).

According to social learning theory, behavior is acquired through reinforcement and modeling as well as observational learning (Bandura,1977). The process of reinforcement is based on the principle that behavior is modified by its consequences. Bandura's theory represents a growing focus on cognition with mental representations and information processing abilities seen as mediating links between the stimulus and response (Bandura,1986). This view suggests that the individual unilaterally makes choices and personally has a stake in development. Work by Perry and Bussey (1979) extends Bandura's and finds that children learn which behaviors are considered appropriate for males and which for females by observing many men and women and boys and girls and by noticing which behaviors are performed frequently or rarely by males and females. These abstractions of sex-appropriate behavior serve as models for their own sex. Cognitive social learning theorists emphasize the importance of social factors in influencing the behaviors and characteristics adopted by children regarding same-sex modeling (Golumbok & Fivush, 1994). The gap between social learning and cognitive theories of gender development has narrowed so much that it is no longer meaningful to separate the two.

Gender schematic perception is constructive and interactive, i.e., the constant interaction between incoming information and the individual's pre-existing schema constantly helps determine what is perceived or seen (Bem,1981;1993). Rogoff's model of development (1990), is viewed as a collaborative human cultural effort which extends the constructivist model by incorporating what she terms "intersubjectivity", a sharing of focus and purpose between children and their more skilled partners. This partnership of "guided participation" is either tacit or active and provides a framework for how children's thinking about their world is shaped. Vygotsky in an analysis by Wertsch (1985), portrays language as the process through which the meaning of signs becomes less dependent on the context of the situation and forms abstract thought, e.g., a symbol system which alters the cultural development of the individual.

Jerome Bruner (1990), concludes that symbols become imbedded thus, culturally shaping an individual's narrative thinking to form the foundation for a dialectic for how we understand ourselves and the cultural world in which we live. It is through this

evolution in thinking that patterns and continuity in human perception and experience occur (Danesi,1993).

Children do not exist on their own, rather their knowledge is made in partnership with what exists in their world. It is through these multiple relationships that children, and we as adults, act, react, interact and create meaning that guides our thinking and our behavior. In this paper we are examining the narratives of young girls, K-4, in an effort to understand the examined and unexamined stories they use to shape their beliefs and their actions. Particular focus is centered on the young girls' continued voicing of "nice" as an organizing construct for their definition of self. Our work has been guided by the preceeding studies and developmental theories.

Participants, Site, and the Research Team

This study of 37 girls (K-5) is part of a larger study of 104 boys and girls (Tillman & McDonald, 1994) who were students in two independent college preparatory schools in the midwest. All girls whose parents signed consent forms were eligible to be interviewed, and each girl gave written and verbal assent. This paper will specifically examine six transcripts: two kindergarten, two second grade, and two fourth grade girls, who were chosen because of their representativeness of the total group. There were other transcripts which were atypical, but they were not representative of the total group of participants.

The participants are students in an independent, coeducational, college preparatory day school located in a suburb of a large midwestern city. The school has high academic expectations and students are screened for admission. These conditions result in a student body which is above average intellectually and academically as well as one having few students with severe physical or learning disabilities. Thirty-six of the girls were white, and one was African-American, and all were from middle to upper middle class families which reflected the traditional white Anglo-Saxon, upper middle class values explicitly and implicitly stated both in the school and its mission statement.

The girls were interviewed individually and audio-taped by a member of the research team which consisted of four investigators, three women and one man. All members of the team had extensive experience in working with children as educators or psychologists.

Guiding Questions:

We analyzed this particular data set to gain knowledge and understanding of what constituted the world that the girls confidently knew, i.e., how to act or how to make a decision. We reanalyzed the data in terms of sources of culture and information the girls either knowingly or unknowingly offered or revealed through the examples used.

1. What did the children know; how did they know that? Empirical, abstract, tacit.
2. What forms of knowing did they use?

Probes: Where did they gain knowledge?
Family (parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.)
School (teachers, friends, curriculum agendas)

3. Can a broader cultural "knowing" be discerned?

Theoretical Underpinnings:

Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism (1969) asserts that actions, things, and events are given value and meaning by humans and those meanings and evaluations are not stable, they can change or be reinterpreted. For example, a child may not experience pain from an injury while in a sporting event, but would feel the pain when the activity ended. In our terms this premise meant that the reality of the world of the child was valid and important to grasp. We did not attempt to change a child's perspective, but rather to capture that perspective so that the world of the child could be better understood. Bakhtin (1986) contends that in the process of authoring a life narrative, one develops a relationship of self with others and self with the world and that meaning is made through that relationship. The child comes to see her/himself in a kind of connected autonomy. In the process of uncovering the child's local knowledge (Erickson, 1968) and her/his reasons for action in her/his terms expressed in their vignettes, we gain access to the child's perspective of her/her world and how she/he operates in it.

Data Base:

Primary sources consisted of six transcripts: six girls representing Kindergarten, second, and fourth grades.

Secondary data sources were the mission statement and history of the school, Brown and Gilligan's 1990 report on the Laurel Harvard

project, fieldnotes from two members of the Laurel-Harvard team, data gathered from the piloting of interview questions from summer, 1991, both formal (i.e., curricula) and informal documents concerning the schools and the children (i.e., interviewers were occasionally given hand drawn pictures or other items by the children they interviewed, informal observations of the children and teachers in class and on the playground, and informal conversations with parents and teachers.

Discussion of Analysis:

What is the world that the children are given and what are the lessons they learn? In order to analyze and understand the transcripts of the children, we felt a need to examine the children's expressed meaning making elicited from their experiences in their primary (family) and secondary (school and friends) socializing units. Analysis of the transcripts revealed the multiple layers of messages and behaviors being transmitted to the children. The girls had a clear knowledge of and ability to articulate their knowing of the roles of family members, and their place and appropriate behaviors within that unit. The culture of the school works in a dialectical relationship with the teachers and families of the children. As a secondary socializing agent, a school maintains a position which is highly congruent or incongruent with the primary experiences of the children and their home lives. In this study the school has been deliberately chosen by the parents as a desirable place for these children to be. Since this has to have been a very considered choice, we can assume a high degree of congruence in shared values, or at least the desire to share the ethos represented in the school through the curriculum, the teachers, and other children and families.

Family expectations and the girls' experiences in them came to be mirrored in their interactions with friends and classmates. All of the girls defined the construct of "nice" from the experiences within the context of their own home and were seen to operationalize it in transactions at school and with friends, or as a response to the fable of the mole and the porcupine and the hypothetical "new girl on the block".

FAMILY:

The representation of "Mom" and "Dad" was consistent from kindergarten through the fourth grade. The second grade girls describe mom as "a regular housewife who bakes and reads us stories", (2214) or who "takes us shopping or to the museums and

fun things" (2216). Only one of these girls' moms worked outside of the home, and she taught school. Mom was seen as the parent who taught the children skills, e.g., tying shoes, cleaning cuts, or offering solace during difficult times. She is the parent who goes to the grocery or toy store and shops as well as attending parties at school, and then does her work at home.

Dad is consistantly portrayed as "working all the time" (2216, 4225, 4323), being willing to engage in sports and games, or as the disciplinarian who supervises homework, spanks, or gets angry if rules aren't upheld. Dad's presence was strongly felt by all of the girls in spite of the fact that he was rarely home. At the same time, Dad was the parent with whom the girls sought to play. There was no evidence in the narratives that either the girls or the mothers were displeased or had any other expectation that the father to be a greater participant in the life of the family. In fact, a collusion of tacit approval that dad's role and participation in the family, while important, was in fact quite peripheral.

These kindergarten girls' descriptions of their parents represent those found in the other transcripts.

I: Does your whole family have dinner together?
C: Yeah, we always do
I: You always do? That's nice.
C: That's only when dad is not home, so we don't really have dinner altogether, 'cause dad is not really home with us anymore like he used to be in the old days.
I: Oh, where is dad now?
C: Work, work, work, work. (0202)

I: Does your daddy work?
C: Yes. Sometimes he's out of town. He came home yesterday.
I: What does he do when he works?
C: He makes money, that's his job, to earn money.
I: What does your mommy do?
C: She has to pick up Katie if she cries.
I: So your mommy stays at home?
C: Yeah. Well she doesn't when she has to bring us to school. (0303)

SCHOOL:

The kindergarten girls perceive school as a place where they have to clean-up and take rests. One girl described happiness as

having two days off from school! However, it is in this context of school that the girls begin to learn about other adults and peers, and determine if their knowledge of the rules and strategies learned in their personal world of parents and siblings work in different settings. New information combines with old as "stop, drop, and roll", proceedures for fire emergencies are learned, and the children's view of the world expands.

Teachers replace parents in becoming the safety net for the girls. The cry became, "Get the teacher" if boys are fighting, someone falls, the rules aren't being followed, or an argument needs resolution. Girls perceived the dominant role emerging for the teacher as a rescuer rather than teacher as a facilitator for curricular issues. The transition from mother as intervenor to teacher as intervenor occurs quite seamlessly for the girls, although at times the two collaborate.

(in response to a playground conflict with friend)

> C: "She told on us, and I was...she told on actually me and we went and we told on her. We told Mrs. H. who was on recess duty all about it and what happened and then somebody went to get Kay so Mrs. H. could start talking to her about it." (2216)

Lessons about the distinctions between girls and boys are learned at school in the classroom and on the playground. The girls are ethnographers as they listen and observe transactions and make distinctions as they uncritically construct a "nice" self against an opposite construct of "not nice" or "competitive" for the boys.

> I: "Do you see anything different in school about, for example, how teachers treat boys and girls?"
> C: "No, well sometimes. They usually think of girls as being the good girl, or good people, like sometimes the boys get into a lot of trouble and sometimes the girls, when they do something they don't get into as much trouble."
> I: "Ahh, so do you think that the boys do more things that are wrong or not, I mean that the girls do just as many things that are wrong, but somehow the boys get punished more?"
> C: "Well, the boys at my school, they usually just goof-off and do whatever they feel like doing."
> I: "Now, do the girls do that too?"
> C: "Sometimes, but not usually."
> I: "Why do you think that is?"

C: "I don't know." (4225)

This second grade girl has explained that sometimes she does play with the boys of the playground, "but they never pass to me or anything like that". The interviewer continues to probe:

I: "And do the girls let the boys play when they come and ask?
C: "Yes."
I: "Why do you think they do that?"
C: "Girls are nicer than boys are I think."
I: "You think so?"
C: "Cause whenever I go to my brother's pack meeting, I see boys running around everywhere. When I go to my girl scout meeting, we just sit like little angels, and just be nice and follow the rules."
I: "Why do you think that is that the boys don't follow the rules as much?"
C: "Cause their leaders don't really care."
I: "Do you think if girls behaved the same way the boys did that it would be okay?"
C: "No"
I: "Why?"
C: "Cause I think the girls' leaders look and protect them. If we behaved like that she would maybe call our mothers that we're acting not very nice."

This young girl continues to expand her understanding of the differences between boys and girls, and in her story we can hear the values that have been communicated to her.

C: "Girls are sweet and they don't do the same things as boys do."
I: "What kinds of things do boys do that are not nice?"
C: " Well, sometimes they talk about really stupid things like which boy scout group has a better game to play, and it's totally stupid."
I: "And what about at school? Do you think that the boys and girls act differently at school too?"
C: "Well, usually the boys don't finish their papers first. Always one of the girls does."
I: "Uh huh."
C: "Cause they're maybe smarter."
I: "You think the girls are smarter?"

C: "Yeah, cause they listen to the teacher. And usually the boys, they pick at their fingernails and don't listen. So, they have to raise their hand and say, what do we have to do?" (2214)

It is in their relationships with their friends, nearly exclusively girls, that the girls struggle with the dissonance created as they try to weave their concept of friend with the reality of their experiences and an explicit expectation of the role of a friend. It appears that the girls construct a model of an idealized friend that they expressly know is not perfect and then attempt to construct that icon, and in this process, they seem doomed to disappointment and failure.

C: "A perfect friend would be somebody that is always beside me always there listening to me doing things that I want and they want to do and everything is the same and we like each other. We were like identical twins. And we play lots of games and stuff."
I: "And do you know anyone who you think is a perfect friend?"
C: "No."
I: "Do you think you're a perfect friend?"
C: "No."
I: "Why aren't you a perfect friend?"
C: "Because nobody could be a perfect friend." (2216)

This second grader describes an elaborate sheet of written plans which she and two friends construct each week in order to decide play arangements and specific activities for the three to follow. She continues and explains how the plan is ineffective and her "friends" don't listen to her, but when a "non-friend" becomes a participant in the unit, that girl is redefined as a "best-friend who will always be my friend' until the original two "friends" are ready to include 2216 again. This girl's loyalty to the primary friendship unit continues in spite of her exclusion and the entry of a different girl. Through the use of symbols a fourth grader is able to characterize a friend who has endured over time, a change of school, and a move to a new neighborhood.

C: "Yeah, she lives on my stree, and since we're moving away, she has to not, she can't walk over anymore. She has to ride, but she's there. If something happens like when my grandad died and stuff like that."

I: "And she was there and she helped you. How did she help you?"
C: "She called me down and tried not to make me think about it. And like not much, but it was sort of hard, and so she just tried to do some things, like she brought me something. I can't remember. I think it was a cupcake, and it was really good." (4323)

The friend was concerned with feelings and was able to respond to the loss of the grandfather by offering a token, quite likely one which had been pleasurable to her, to communicate her caring and empathy to her friend.

"Nice" values observed, assimilated, and expressed depict the effectiveness of the training the girls have been experiencing. They continually say that they would play with a girl not liked by them, because they should. "I just want to be nice to everybody around me" became the rallying point because they don't want "to hurt her feelings, and not make her sad or anything or left out because she has no friends besides us." This girl has taken her mother's advice and operationalized it. She described actions she had used in an incident with a friend, and responded to the interviewer's question.

I: "Who taught you that?"
C: "Well, my mom. Well, one time my friends were mad at me because I was mad at them, because they were excluding me because they went to a different school. And so I rode off and they were mad. And when I came home, my mom said to write them a letter, and telling them how would you feel if you were in my own shoes." (4323)

The mother's involvement and the belief that she was teaching a strategy to facilitate her daughter's ability to express her feelings and deal with conflict is seen to be in sharp contrast to the boys in our earlier work (Tillman & McDonald, 1992) who did not expect or get parent participation in addressing conflict with friends. Instead, the boys "walked away, and came back the next day" or were told by their father's "don't be a marshmallow". The girl in the preceeding story had actually ridden away from the conflict and gone home. What is not known is why the mother intervened, but it is clear that her presence altered the daughter's view and behavior for future situations.

A litany of descriptors are assigned to boys by the girls (K-5) in this study:

Boys play wrestling, tag, football.
Boys fight, girls don't.
Boys are overly active and are more competetive.
Boys sweat.
It's their instinct!

The girls' self described litany is in sharp contrast to their characterization of the boys:

Girls play house, or nice games.
Girls don't fight, they just talk to each other.
Girls tell the teachers if they need help.
Girls think better.
Girls know it's only a game.

Discussion:

According to Vico, the child's mind is a re-enactment of human history, what is happening currently is forming future history (Danesi, 1993). The girls in this study are practicing communal sense by taking their impressions and responses from the adults, friends, and institutions in which they participate and are constructing a schema for themselves based on their knowledge of mental and cultural relativism. They learn the values of "nice" which exist in their upper middle class community of the family, and see them translated into a school setting chosen for them by their parents. The teachers, perhaps in an effort to afford girls the same classroom experience as boys receive, re-enact a model of intervention first learned from the girls' mothers and fathers. The irony is that in so doing, they set up a dichotomy that has "nice" as the recognized and rewarded behavior while at the same time actively and tacitly reinforcing an acceptance of "boys will be boys", but girls are better. The girls mothers took the responsibility of daily childrearing and managing the family while at the same time appearing to offer understanding and support for the fathers to structure their work time to have priority in their lives. The children and mothers created through the stories of these girls a willingness to accept the various family roles.

The families of the girls represented in this study clearly do not reflect the demographics of the majority of families in the United States, nor are they reflective of all of the families in this study. However, the six girls we have discussed in this paper and their families do represent the majority of the thirty-seven girls who participated in this work. It is important to note that parents of these girls go to great length to uphold what they believe to be the

desirable schema for "family", i.e., two parents, father working, mother working at home and responsible for child-rearing, social and community commitments. Dual working parents had full-time child care arrangements for before and after school hours.

The girls in our study seem to corroborate what Carol Dweck (1978) described as "learned helplessness". Boys are praised for their knowledge and giving the right answer while girls are praised for obedience and compliance. Conversely, boys are reprimanded for misbehavior, but girls are reprimanded for not giving the right answers (Dweck et al., 1978; Stockard, 1980). It is possible that the girls feel a sense of security in their world derived from the knowledge that they can depend on adults to be their advocates, however, it is also possible that too much adult intervention can create a sense of a lack of empowerment within the girls.

If we accept the view that childhood is "an apprenticeship in thinking" (Rogoff, 1990), the girls in this study are indeed having a successful training in "nice". The girls are being guided and coached by adults who are more skilled than they as they learn how "a girl like me" (Bakhtin, 1986) is supposed to behave. Vygotsky explains how these seemingly innocuous daily activities of children become an embedded construct in a child's cognitive schema:

> "Every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, on two planes. First on the social plane, and then on the psychological; first, between people, and then, inside the child." (1987, vol. 3, p. 145).

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